Beyond Memory

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CHAPTER SIX
LADIES OF SONG

As a motherland, Africa has a number of female singers named after her in the South African music industry – Mama Africa, Lady Africa, Princess Of Africa and so on. At the end of this chapter we will know more about them. The “First Lady Of Song”, Dolly Rathebe inspired so many young ladies to enter the entertainment industry traditionally regarded as a male domain. In an interview Dorothy Masuka said she met the film star in the streets of Pimville while she was still a young schoolgirl, and just one word of appreciation from Dolly motivated her into stardom. In a way, she was a pioneer. Miriam Zenzi Makeba aka Mama Africa has set a high performance standard for musicians of her time both as a singer/composer and ambassador of her country to the outside world. She is a perfectionist. Her music career will come under the spotlight when we look at musos in exile. One of the most glorious moments in the history of our music industry occurred in 1999 when the senior ladies of song were honoured with lifetime achievement awards: Thandi Klaasen, Abigail Khubeka, Dorothy Masuka, Sophie Mgcina and Margaret Singana. More about the awards later when we look at the individual careers of these queens of song.

It was an honour for me to meet the “First Lady Of Song”, the late DOLLY RATHEBE in the early nineties. She was driven all the way from Gauteng for an interview on my programme. The appointment was prompted by the release of the 1993 album A Call For Peace with her backing band Elite Swingsters. Even at her age it was clear to me that in her days she was a beauty queen. No wonder she inspired the tsotsitaal response, “Double Dolly!”, which means “I’m very fine thanks!” I addressed her as “Sis Dolly” throughout the interview and she was very relaxed and peaceful. At the time she stayed at 289D Mabopane in
Tshwane, where she told me she was involved with “Women’s RDP”. She was blessed with three children. Dolly Rathebe was born in 1930 and grew up in Randfontein. At the age of 19 the lady of many firsts was already making waves on the local scene. In 1949 she was featured as a night club singer in the film, *Jim Comes To Joburg*, making her the first known African film star. The film’s soundtrack was Alan Silinga’s composition, *Intliziyo Zibuhlungu*. Following the success of the film she also featured in *The Magic Garden*, *Sarafina*, *Mapantsula* as well as various television films like *Malunde*. Dolly was such a stunner she also made history by being the first black lady to grace a magazine cover. That magazine was *Drum!* She was a founder member of African Jazz Revue And Variety Show when Alf Herbert launched it in 1954. In the early fifties she married composer, musician and economist Welkom Duru of New Brighton, Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape. Duru composed great songs for his lovely wife including *Unothalili* and the golden oldie *Mbombele*. Some of the other bands she fronted as singer were the Harlem Swingsters and the Manhattan Stars. Dolly also performed with the music group, African Inkspots. The group was formed in 1946 inspired by the American Inkspots. The singers caught the public’s attention when they were featured in the film *Jimmy Comes To Joburg*, featuring the late great Dolly Rathebe. According to group spokesperson Showman Mogotsi, who was interviewed on SABC 2’s *Morning Live* on Saturday, 17 November 2007, the group also featured in *Song of Africa*.

In 1964 Dolly joined an Afro-Jazz band that would become a big part of her life – Elite Swingsters. The band was discovered by Lesotho-born Lebenya Matlotlo who arrived in Johannesburg in the 1940s. Between 1955 and 1963 he was a record company talent scout and recording assistant. His first hit composition was the Elite Swingsters’ *Phalafala*. The group was formed by Johannes “Chooks” Tshukudu in the late fifties. The original members of the Soweto band were Johannes “Chooks” Tshukudu (bass), Paul Rametsi (tenor sax) and Philip Thami Madi (alto sax). They were later joined by composer and saxman Peter Mokonotela who would become the band’s leader and main composer. Dimpy Shabalala also joined the band later. This group became very popular both nationally and internationally as they released other hits like *Funky Mama* and *Cool Mood*. As Dolly’s backing band they travelled the length and breadth of this land and even went beyond its borders. Their other hits that followed were *Now or Never* and *Blessing*. After a lull created by the popularity of soul music in the late seventies and disco in the eighties, they bounced back with the album *Woza* (1991) featuring Dolly. Then followed *A Call For Peace* (Gallo Records, 1993) adding their voice to a national call for calm in the midst of the pre-election violence. The line-up on the recording consisted of the three original members plus Paul Ntleru (bass), Daniel Ngema (piano/accordion/guitar/sax), Philip Mbele (keyboards/guitar/bass) and of course the lead vocalist, Dolly. It was produced by Hamilton Nzimande and West Nkosi and engineered by
Richard Austen. The title track presents Dolly Rathebe, the preacher, at her best. The CD also included her wedding hit *Mamoshimane*, Chooks’ composition *Elite Blues* as well as Lebenya Matlotlo’s *Phalafala*. *Siya Gida/We Dance* was released in 1997. In 1998 Sony Music Entertainment released their compilation CD *I Love Soweto/Hotstuff* (Sony Music, 1998). To celebrate the band’s many fruitful years in the industry as well as its leader’s 60th birthday, Ama Elite – Di Elite (Universal Music, 2001) was co-produced by the late Peter Mokonotela and Fernando Perdigao who also engineered it at Downtown Studios. It includes *Bra Gwigwi*, a tribute to a hot saxman of the Golden Age of South African Jazz, Gwigwi Mrwebi. The line-up on the recording was: Peter Mokonotela (alto saxophone and penny whistle), Bennette Rahlao (alto saxophone and penny whistle), Conrad Zulu (tenor saxophone and penny whistle), George Manxola (guitars), Paul Ntleru (bass) and Jack Mogale (drums).

Like musicians of her era she faced two main challenges in her career – gangsters and policemen. She related to me how she was once arrested for being found near the mine dumps with a photographer of *Drum!* magazine for a photo shoot. The charge? Being in the company of a white man (Immorality Act). Later as the gangsters got to know her well they requested what the police used to ask her to do for them – sing! Just as Alexandra Township had its reign of terror by the Spoilers and Msomi Gang, Sophiatown was ruled by gangs like The Americans. In the new order she blessed many important events both as musician and celebrity. The greatest honour South Africa bestowed on her was when the SAMA presented her with a Lifetime Achievement Award, an accolade reserved for a few champions of the industry like Joseph Shabalala of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, that mbube group that rocketed to international stardom with their golden voices and brought home the coveted Grammy Award. A stroke took the 74-year-old Sis Dolly away from us on 16 September 2004. She was buried on 26 September 2004 at Roodepoort Cemetery. May her soul rest in peace.

Nine months later a stroke claimed her lifetime composer and leader, Peter Mokonotela, on 27 May 2005. Peter who received his education at Orlando High School in the late fifties, was inspired by the likes of Kippie “Morolong” Moeketsi and Mackay Davashe. This former leader of the Jazz Preachers ranked among the cream of South Africa’s saxophone players. He was laid to rest at Kliptown cemetery on Saturday, 4 June 2005.

Songbird Thandi Klaasen grew up in Sophiatown. Her father was a shoemaker and her mother a domestic worker. Her interest in music started showing when she sang in various churches of her neighbourhood. Later she joined groups like Gaieties, Harlem Swingsters and Jazz Dazzlers. She rose to stardom when she started sharing stages with female stars of the time like Dolly Rathebe, Miriam Makeba, Dorothy Masuka and Sophie Mgcina. The cultural nerve centre of Sophiatown was the Odin Cinema. In a recent television interview she said she
could still remember dancing there with a fabulous dancer called Duba Duba. She said one lady who inspired her tremendously was Emily Kwenane. Klaasen who was born Thandi Mpambani later married Lucas Klaasen. She was in the Todd Mtshikiza musical *King Kong* when Jack Hylton took it to the UK, but when some of the cast members decided to settle, she opted to return home. Like her peers she can easily switch from one music genre to another. In 1976 she received the Count Pushkin Award for Best Female Vocalist. Besides the various local musicians she performed with, she shared the stage with international stars like Patti Labelle. She worked with the German Kai Horsthemke in *Psychedelic Cowboy And Sister Nun* which also featured Thembi Mtshali and Larry Amos. She also starred in Des and Dawn Lindberg’s *Black Mikado* with artists like Ben “Satch” Masinga, Barrie Shah, Patrick Ndlovu, Leslie Mongezi, Duke Makasi, Sammy Brown, Felicia Marion and Sipho Gumede. As a respected public figure and role model she graced important events like the “Sophiatown – Heart And Soul Day” held in Sophiatown as part of the Cultural and Heritage Renaissance. Thandi also participated in and performed during the 2004 National Film, Video And Sound Archives Birthday Bash. Dolly Rathebe and Joe Mafela were also part of the celebration. Like Margaret Singana, she had a life changing experience; no, she wasn’t paralysed but her face was burned. Despite the disaster she continued with her public life and helped other individuals in the same position but less privileged. Testimony to this was a fundraising concert for “Children Of Fire”, which assisted victims like the young Piet Majola. In 1999 she was honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award by PSG, Anchor Life and SABC 2 for her contribution to jazz in South Africa. In 2005 she was featured in Melodi International Jazz Festival with Sibongile Khumalo, Dorothy Masuka, Abigail Khubeka, Gloria Bosman and Sylvia Mdunyelwa at Sun City, North West Province. In the same year SAMA 12 honoured her with that coveted Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2006 President Thabo Mbeki honoured her with the Order of Ikhamanga.

The late **Margaret Singana** who was known to her music fans as “Lady Africa”, was born Margaret Nomvula Mcingana in Queenstown, Eastern Cape. Her mother, Agnes Mcingana kindled the flame of song in Margie’s heart at a young age. One of her biggest hits was a song simply named *My Name Is Margaret*. Two of the most significant role players in her career have been Gibson Kente and Mike Fuller. She appeared in Alan Paton’s musical *Sponono*, Gibson Kente’s *Sikhalo* as well as the 1974 evergreen Bertha Egnos and Gail Lakier musical, *The Warrior*. The band of the musical *Ipi Tombi* featured her rendering hits like *The Warrior, Ipi Tombi* and *Mama Tembu’s Wedding*. After enriching the Arts in South Africa, Bertha Egnos who was born in 1913 passed away in Johannesburg at the age of 90 in 2003. Some of Singana’s other hits include *I Never Loved A Man, Orang Outang and Johannesburg*. She has won many gold discs, mostly with her hits written by Patrick van Blerk. Her participation in the “Concert In The Park”
put her hit *Hamba Bekile* among the 23 tracks that generated funds for Operation Hunger. A stroke in 1978 interrupted her career but in 1986 she bounced back with the theme song *We Are Growing* from Bill Faure’s television series *Shaka Zulu*, which starred soccer goalkeeper “The Black Cat” Henry Cele as the mighty king. Sadly, Henry passed away at St Augustine Hospital at the beginning of November 2007 aged 58. He was buried in Durban. In the eighties Margaret was so much in demand. I remember her appearing with her MFM stable mates, Hotline, in a TV1 Special doing the hit song *Music For Africa*. In 1984 she released a ‘back to roots’ kind of album entitled *Isiphiwo Sam* (My Gift) backed by one of the best African traditional music bands in the country, Bayete. In short, her albums included *Isiphiwo Sam, Margaret Nomvula Singana, Ipi Tombi, Lady Africa Meets Shaka Zulu, Love Is The Power, Tribal Fence, City Soul, Hamba Bekile, Where’s The Love, Singana Gold and Lady Africa*. Although she spent her last days bound to a wheelchair, her contribution to the music of South Africa including rock with bands like Rabbit and Hawk has left an indelible mark in our “spiritual hall of fame”. Her dedication was finally recognised in 1999 when she received a Lifetime Achievement Award from PSG, Anchor Life and SABC 2 for her contribution to jazz in South Africa. She was posthumously presented with the same award for her contribution to music by SAMA 11 in 2005.

**Patience Africa** was another tigress of South African music in the late 1970s and the 1980s. The second-born in a family of six (two sisters and three brothers), she started singing at the age of 11. After showing her talent as a student, she joined a Durban group known as Jazz Sledge. When she went to Johannesburg she joined the Hollywood Jazz Band. Upon her marriage in 1965 she took a break from music and became a housewife. When she later contacted West Nkosi of Mavuthela Music company for a come-back, the result was the recording of one of her best sellers *Bhula Sangoma*, became huge even in neighbouring states like Zimbabwe. She was mostly popular for her love songs, which included *Sakatuku* and *Basadi Mamelang*. Her albums include *Ilanga Malishona* (1977), *Siyabonga* (Thank You) 1979, *Let’s Groove Tonight* (1980), *Ebang Le Mohau* (1982), *Mabewana A Duduza* (SABC Transcription) 1983, *Batbo Ba Lesotho* (1984), *Sesi We… Life Is What You Make It* (1986) and *Wozani La* (1987).

**Sophie Thoko Mgcina** first showed her interest in singing by participating in a church choir and winning first prize in a talent contest in 1957 in Germiston at the age of 19. After joining a group called the Casino Brothers, she sang for various other bands. A star of the historic *King Kong*, some of her peers with whom she shared the stage were singers like Margaret Singana, Thandi Klaasen, Abigail Khubeke, Dolly Rathebe, Dorothy Masuka, Ribbon Dlamini, Mary Rabotapi and Jeanette Tsagane. She loved listening to good music in order to improve her own singing and was mainly influenced by Billie Holiday. Most people still remember her cabaret act *Sound Of The Township* as well as her singing of *Madam Please* in the 1972 musical, *Phiri*. She also produced and wrote
the music score for the musical, *Poppi Nongena*. The lady many loved to call “Sunshine” was a graduate of the Federated Union Of Black Artists Academy (FUBA). Sophie believed in hard work to enhance her talent, as such she even registered with the Guildhall School Of Music in England for a course in Music and Drama. Some of the films she participated in include *Dingaka* (1965), *Cry Freedom* (1987), *A Dry White Season* (1989), *A Good Man In Africa* (1994), the documentary *Amandla! A Documentary In Four Part Harmony* (2002) as well as *Zulu Love Letter*. Thoko was a linguist who by 1966 was translating song lyrics from English to indigenous languages at the SABC. This composer and performer won the FNB Vita Award, the US Obie Award and in 1984 was nominated for the Sir Lawrence Olivier Award. A multilingual singer, her hits include *Mmangwane, Morena* and *Stationeng*. Like some of her peers she was versatile and could switch between jazz, cabaret and pop. In her days she toured widely in South Africa, the former protectorates, Zimbabwe, US, UK and Down Under. South Africa honoured her with a Lifetime Achievement Award sponsored by PSG, Anchor Life and SABC 2 in 1999. On 26 September 2005 she received the Order Of Ikhamanga from President Thabo Mbeki. The Arts And Culture Trust presented her with a Lifetime Achievement Award during the Night Of The fifties on 25 November 2005. On Friday, 2 December 2005 she bowed out of a career that lasted 45 years, and left us at the age of 68. On Saturday, 10 December 2005 after a funeral service at Katlehong’s DH Williams Hall, Sophie Thoko Mgcina-Davids was laid to rest at the South Park Cemetery in Boksburg.

**Abigail Khubeke** is a multi-talented musician who is comfortable with a variety of music genres like jazz, cabaret, soul and pop. This songstress was born in 1939 in Orlando East, Soweto to a family of five. She was singing in the St Peter’s College students group, the Father Huddleston Band, aka St Peter’s College Jazz Band when she caught the attention of Sam Leballo. Sam was the man behind the success story of the Skylarks (formerly Sunbeams). He sent Miriam Makeba to Kilnerton Training Institute to recruit her to take the place of Helen van Rensburg who had left the band in 1957. Abigail whose father was a soccer administrator had a rich tenor voice at the tender age of 16. Other members of The Skylarks, which was started in 1956 were Miriam Makeba, Mary Rabotapi and Mummy Girl Nketle. Additional members were Sam Ngakane and Nomonde Shawu. Some of their hits included Gibson Kente’s 1958 composition *Live Humble* as well as *Hush* and another Gibson Kente release, *Inkomo Zodwa*, in 1959. In 1960 Abigail left for England with the *King Kong* cast. She later returned to South Africa with Mary Rabotapi and tried to keep the name of The Skylarks alive with the likes of the young Letta Mbulu but its era was gone. In their early days The Skylarks released albums like *Miriam Makeba And The Skylarks* (Teal Polygram). Abigail’s first solo venture was *Let’s Stay Together* (1972). In 1983 she recorded her debut solo album *Songs Of My People* produced by that master bassist, arranger
and composer, Victor Mhleli Ntoni and featuring the hit *Sebakanyana*. She also released a self-titled album. A professional actor, she appeared in sitcoms like *Going Up* with Joe Mafela, a comedian who like Eddie Murphy has recorded his own solo music albums. In 1999 she received a Lifetime Achievement Award from PSG, Anchor Life and SABC 2 for her contribution to jazz in South Africa. The event was held at SABC Broadcast Centre in Auckland Park, Johannesburg. In 2006 President Thabo Mbeki honoured her with the Order of Ikhamanga. Her words of wisdom still ring in my head: “The pages of my life are with the people whose lives I have touched.” She said this in an interview on SABC 3’s programme *The Power Within*, one year before her 80th birthday.

**Mara Teboho Louw** was born in July 1952 in Mzimhlophe, Soweto. Like many of our powerful voices she started singing in a church choir. Some of her first awards was for best alto soloist while in Wilbur Baqwa’s Wilbur Music Group. Versatile Mara also acted in Gibson Kente’s *Sikhalo* and in 1970 she joined the musical *Meropa* which toured Japan, Hong Kong, Britain and the Philippines. While in London with the musical, she had the honour to perform for the Queen. She went solo in 1976 and performed in countries like former South West Africa (Namibia) in cabaret. She also had a lead role in the musical *African Odyssey*. When American Joe Walker revived *King Kong* in 1979, she played the leading role. She also toured the former protectorates in cabaret and played the role of Tituba in *The Crucible*. Other musicals she featured in include *Ekhaya, Nkosi The Healing Song, My Name Is Alice, Baby Come Duze, Fame* and *Best Little Whorehouse In Texas*. Mara enthralled crowds at the “Concert In The Park” with the hit *Motlalepula*, which was later included in the album of the event. In 1984 Radio Zulu (*Ukhozi FM*) and Radio Sesotho (*Lesedi FM*) nominated her for the Best Singer category in their music awards. Her 1986 mini-album *50 50 Makes 100%* featured the title track and *Love Train* produced by Mally Watson on CCP’s Flame label. Amongst the many albums she featured on as backing vocalist is Hugh Masekela’s *Waiting For The Rain* (*Vuka Afrika*, 1985). In 1985 she married Bill, but later they went their separate ways. By 1988 she was leading the South African Musicians Alliance (SAMA). In 1992 she won an Artes Award for Best Recording. Among her career highlights she counts performing for the Queen of Denmark. Some of Mara Teboho Louw’s hits include *Take Me To The River, Good Love* and *Iphi ‘Ndlela*. Mara, who is a bombshell on stage also featured in one of my favourite movies, *Taxi To Soweto* which starred Patrick Shai. In 1995 she was nominated in the SABC’s Artes Awards for her album *Mara*. The all-rounder artist she is, she played a leading role in the first tshiVenda tv drama series, *Muvhango*, on SABC 2 as Catherine Mukwevho. She also became a judge on M-Net television’s reality talent contest, *Idols*. In 2007 she hosted her own television show *Mara Louw and Friends* on SABC 2 and later joined Richard Loring’s musical *Hairspray*.

Another multi-talented lady is **Thembi Heavygale Mtshali**. Most people
know her as an actor of repute both on stage and screen. She has a powerful voice too! It is interesting to note that at age 21 she nearly joined the nursing profession in 1971, but was stopped by baby Phumzile who was on her way. As an actor, the Kwa-Mashu-born and Mahlabathini raised star cut her teeth performing with the Nokwe family at the YMCA in Durban. In 1972 she met playwright Welcome Msomi who auditioned her for a role in Umabatha which later toured England. In 1974 she was part of the Louis Burke and Joan Brickhill production, Meropa. Thereafter she featured in many theatre and television productions like Backstage, Journey Through Imagination, Up’n Atom, Generations, The Black and White Follies, New Day, Daughter of Nebo, etc. Her movie credits include Country of My Skull, The Wooden Camera and Mapantsula, which saw her nominated as Best Actress for the FNB Vita Awards. Later she toured the world with the magnetic Ipi Tombi, which took her to cities like Lagos, New York and Las Vegas where it ran for years. Thembi’s early music career took her to many parts of the world including the USA and the Caribbean Islands with stars like Hugh Masekela, Eric Gale and Grover Washington between 1977 and 1979. She was a member of the Freedom Singers raising funds for the struggle. She also worked with Miriam Makeba and toured with Abdullah Ibrahim for the musical Kalahari. She was one of the backing vocalists on Mbongeni Ngema’s debut recording, Stimela Sase Zola. In 1984 she fronted a Sipho Gumede-led five-member group, Peace. Thembi’s 1986 solo album Love Is A Flower (Lufana Nembali) was produced and arranged by Tony Rudner and Vusi Khumalo on Soltone Records’ Quavers label. After her role in the successful SABC comedy Sgudi’Snaysi she released an album of the same title in 1987 featuring the blowing skills of hornmen Scorpion Madondo and the late Mandla Masuku. By 1990 she was at Tusk Music Company where she released her star-studded album Today Tomorrow on the Tusk label featuring amongst others Jabu Nkosi, Qunta Mbele, Moses Ngwenya, Bakithi Khumalo, Makhaya Mahlangu, Themba Mkhize, Tata Sibeko, Condry Ziqubu, Vusi Khumalo, Scorpion Madondo, Selwyn Shandel, Mfaniseni Thusi, Fab Grosso and the late Teaspoon Ndelu. Her backing vocalists were Faith Kekana, Deborah Fraser, Princess Mthembu, Thoko Ndlozi, Lorraine Staples, Zamo Mbutho, Sipho Mbele and the late Wings Segale. I list all these stars to illustrate how sometimes record companies would go out of their way to support a project if they really believed in it or wanted to build a name in the stable. From 1995 to 1996 she toured the UK and the US with the musical Marabi. In 1999 she won the Best Actress award for her performance in A Woman In Waiting at the Carthage Festival in Tunisia. By 2005 she was featuring in e-tv’s Madam and Eve and later SABC’s Stokvel. At the time of writing this work she was living in Cape Town with husband Emrys Jones running Spirit Sister Productions together with three other female partners. In 2006 she featured in SABC’s Heartlines value series as well as the play Truth and Translation.

The 1980s female modern pop era in South Africa was led by one Nokuzola
from Langa in Cape Town. Her impact on South Africa’s commercial music could be compared to that of the ‘material girl’ Madonna Louise Ciccone in the United States. By the way, these are the queens of pop whose music introduced the electronic music era. At the time my uncle Jimmy would tell me about musical instruments like the synthesiser, sampler, sequencer and drum machine. Brenda Fassie’s music career will always be mainly associated with three bands – The Big Dudes, Loading Zone and Step Ahead. Born Brenda Nokuzola Fassie on 3 November 1964 to Mathews Mangaliso Fassie and Sarah Fassie, she started singing at the age of three. When she was two years old her father, who was an actor, comedian, magician, singer and sportsman, passed away. At the age of 11 she was singing with Cosmos, a band in which her brother Keith played the piano. Born into a family of musicians, she also sang in her mother’s group, Tiny Tots. In a radio interview she told me that she was from a family of nine, all singing and playing piano except the last born who excels only in singing – Brenda.

She went to Johannesburg with Gibson Kente where she acted and sang in his shows like Hungry Spoons. She went back to Langa, but Sabata Lebona brought her back to Gauteng in 1979. After performing with the famous trio, Joy, she joined Pappa and Blondie who were backed by The Family. When The Family became The Big Dudes she fronted them and shook and shocked the local music industry with their first hit together, Weekend Special, composed by Melvin Mathews and Desmond Malotana in 1983. The former Simasa Primary pupil never looked back. The Big Dudes were Sammy Klaas, Dumisane Ngubeni, Fats Mlange, Desmond Malotane and David Mabaso. One should remember that while South Africans were jamming to Brenda’s Weekend Special, on the international dance platform Madonna’s Holiday was stirring up a storm. I guess that is why even world renowned Time magazine in its 17 December 2001 showcasing of Brenda after her American tour in a three page spread called her “the Madonna of the townships”.

From here the group became known as Brenda and The Big Dudes. In 1984 their smash album Weekend Special on CCP’s Family label delivered a Platinum Disc. The surprise visit at that gala event was her mother, Sarah Fassie. The occasion was also the launch of her new album, Cool Spot, which featured the hit It’s Nice To Be With People. The record company PRO, Enoch Ndlela, called me to rave about the album even before I could lay my hands on it. Interestingly, Ken Haycock who was the MD of CCP at that time would in years to come establish his own record company and give it the name Cool Spot. The success of Weekend Special overseas was boosted by its remixing in New York by Van Gibbs. It even climbed the billboard charts in 1986 and stayed on that world-respected platform for eight weeks! In the UK it was re-mixed by Ian Levine and released in the UK and Australia by EMI. She followed this success with tours of the USA, UK, Brazil, Europe and Australia. In 1984 they released Let’s Stick Together,
an album featuring the title track co-written by Brenda and Dumisane who became her lover. It also featured my personal favourite, *Can’t Stop This Feeling*, composed by Desmond and engineered by Philip Nel. Hot on its heels was the maxi single *Someone To Love* also from Desmond’s pen. In the same year Brenda did a duet with Ronnie Joyce titled *It All Adds Up/Living Together* penned by Russell Kramer. Hits like *Ag, Shame Lovey* endeared her to children all over the land. I once invited her to my children’s programme “Tumi Le Tumelo” at Radio Lebowa (Thobela FM) and the phones never stopped ringing. I still remember that it was on a national “VAT Stay-away” and to ensure her comrades that she was not defying the protest, she would now and then say “Hai ngo VAT” (Away with VAT). The interview was facilitated by CCP’s Philip Vundla. Easy to talk to, but tricky to manage in an interview, she smiled every time I called her “Ma-Brrr”. As if to pep herself up, whenever I asked her to sing one of her songs she’d say to herself: “Thatha Ma-B!” At that time she was the most popular artist with kids; during their music request time every second call would ask for *Too Late For Mama* or *Ag, Shame Lovey* whilst on the international front their top favourite was Karyn White’s *Superwoman*.

Sometimes after the Six-To-Six music festivals of the 1980s Brenda would bring her crew to my house in Lebowakgomo to freshen up and have a little braai. Young girls in my street would gather in my yard to catch a glimpse of their heroine and in turn she would start working on their hair one by one. She just loved kids! That was also confirmed by her pride in her son, Bongani. His name would now and then crop up in every conversation we had.

The group’s musical home was CCP Records and their producer was Mally Watson. Brenda’s live performances were so hot she was in demand all over the country. During Easter and festive seasons she would do more than one show a day, sometimes using flights in cases where venues were very far apart from each other. One of the highlights of her performances at festivals was her presentation of the hit *Higher and Higher*. In the middle of the song the band would suddenly freeze and she would pause; all of a sudden she would sing in a semi-baritone voice: “Brenda Fassie’s gonna take you higher, higher, higher!” And the band would have joined her just as she sang the first “higher”. The crowd would go wild, very wild.

Brenda inspired so many young singers, but the one I’ll never forget is a young guy called Mlamli who sang exactly like her. Recently I was also pleasantly surprised by a young Gospel singer called Cairo doing her “Brenda” thing. The beginning of 1986 saw Brenda receive a Gold Disc Award for the album *Higher And Higher*, which succeeded in selling 20 000 units within the first week of its release. Besides the title track it featured *Promises*, another Desmond hit composition. She also received a Platinum Disc for her previous album, *Touch Somebody*, engineered by Philip Nel, which included a song co-written by Brenda and Dumisani to celebrate the arrival of son, Bongani on 26 August 1984. The
US re-mix of *Bongani* was also released in the UK, Europe and Australia. By 1987 she had parted ways with her band, The Big Dudes, and released her music as Brenda on a new CCP label, Brenda. Her long-term manager was Peter Snyman. Her backing band at festivals became Lazarus Kgagudi’s band, Step Ahead. They worked very hard to get into the shoes of that mighty band. They succeeded and impressed the crowds. Her 1987 album simply titled *Brenda* still produced by Mally Watson and engineered by Richard Mitchell featured her best ballad, *Nobody Loves You Like I Do*, as well as the dance-floor hit *Izolabud*. The latter hit was inspired by some township taxis named after a female South African athlete, Zola Budd (Pieterse). One of her earlier gospel songs was *The Lord Is My Shepherd*, but it was her duet with Chicco in *Soon And Very Soon* that stole many a Christian’s heart. In 1988 she released *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu* (I am because you are) and dedicated the track *Eloyi Lamasabathani* to her mother whose favourite tune it was.

When things looked gloomy for Ma-Brrr, Sello Chicco Twala wrote and produced the album *Black President*, which predicted the release of Dr Nelson Mandela and wishing South Africa a better future. The engineer was once again Richard Mitchell. Another CCP man who’ll always be associated with Brenda’s career is Peter Mbolekwa. In 1989 she released *Too Late For Mama* accompanied by a powerful video. Her hit *Bhala Mabhalane* was included on the CCP compilation album *Superfly Volume 5* (1989). In 1990 Loading Zone became her backing band. As the pressures of showbiz and her personal life mounted, negative media publicity followed her and portrayed her as a bad girl. In response, in 1991 she released *I Am Not A Bad Girl* produced by Selwyn Shandel featuring the title track as well as *Ngiyakusaba*. In 1994 she flew out to London with talented young musician Joe Nina to record her CD *Abantu Bayakhuluma* which featured the hit *Kuyoze Kuyovalwa* (Until Closing).

Brenda’s marriage to Nhlanhla Mbambo was like a royal wedding. It received so much attention one could be excused for thinking that a president was being inaugurated. She celebrated it with the track *Don’t Follow Me* (I’m Married) It did not last long. Her mother passed away in 1993. Her lover, Poppie Sihlahla died in 1995. All these misfortunes depressed her and in 1995 she was booked into a rehabilitation centre. Stories of how she managed or dealt with her problems have been published many times, but I guess everybody has their way of dealing with their life challenges – some acceptable to many, some acceptable to a few or you.

As a tribute to her mother she released the album *Mama* on 4 November 1997. The death of Princess Diana inspired the title of her 1997 album *Paparazzi* produced by Godfrey Pilane. On that album she did a duet with one of South Africa’s popular contemporary African musicians, the late Jabu Khanyile, just as she did on her previous 1996 album *Now Is The Time* with the DRC’s rumba star Papa Wemba. In 1998 her monster comeback album *Memeza* was released featuring the
hit *Vulindlela*. She was back in town – Brenda kai one! The hit song was crowned by SAMA 10 as Song of the Decade. Then followed *Nomakanjani* in 1999. Chicco had succeeded in resuscitating her career and placing her back on the highway to Hitland. In the same year she was awarded a Kora award as Best Female Artist. When IT technicians were making a killing out of the millennium bug threat and smiling all the way to the bank, she welcomed the millennium by dedicating a CD to her ancestors, *Amadlozi* (2000), which featured the title-track as well as *Shoot Them Before They Grow*. She also received SAMA awards for her Best Selling albums *Memeza* (1998), *Nomakanjani* (1999), *Amadlozi* (2000), and *Mina Nawe* (2001). The latter CD featured the hit *Ngohlala Nginje* and was produced by Chicco who also co-wrote the music with her. For that, Chicco was nominated as Best Producer in the SAMAs. Her other big hits included: *No No No Senor*, *i-Straight Lendaba*, *Too Late For Mama*, *Sumbulala*, *If I Hurt You Little Boy* and *Amalahle*.

When kwaito music captured the imaginations of the youth in South Africa, she asked one of the most powerful stars and producers of the genre, Arthur Mafokate, to produce her music. Out of that partnership a hit, *Ngoke Umconfirm* from the album of the same name was born. Another interesting feature in Brenda’s music career was her musical relationship with Senyaka Kekana. They used to exchange words in a musical dialogue. An example of this is Brenda’s *Amagents* and Senyaka’s *Mampara*. In the pre-election violence of the early nineties the residents of Boipatong were attacked and massacred. In duet with The Village Pope (Tsepo Tshola), she recorded a track titled *Boipatong* to register her condolences with the bereaved families and the affected community. Brenda was one of those few individuals who was not afraid to speak her mind. For this, some hated her while some secretly adored her for speaking on their behalf. When singing poet Mzwakhe Mbuli was arrested for allegedly taking part in a bank robbery, she led protests during his court appearances. After serving his sentence, Mbuli’s tenacious spirit saw him resume his crusade recording more music and fighting piracy.

In July 2001 Brenda’s record company released a compilation CD of her hits titled *Brenda: Greatest Hits*... In the same year she received a Special Judges Award from the Kora All Africa Music Awards. On 26 April 2004 the superstar whose other works included *Myekeleni* and *Mali* complained of shortage of breath due to an asthma attack at her home in Buccleuch. Her brother, Themba Fassie, rushed her to Sunninghill Hospital. The whole nation held its breath for almost a week as her health kept deteriorating. Back home in Makana Square, Langa Township, family, friends and fans crossed their fingers as they conducted prayer meetings for “the Queen of South African Pop” to recover. Even State President Thabo Mbeki paid her a visit at the hospital. She finally bowed out at the age of 40 to join the bigger Orchestra. I attended her memorial service at Grace Bible Church in Soweto and it was like a royal gathering. The MC was that creative award-winning writer, producer, promoter and orator, Duma Ka Ndlovu. Her
funeral in Langa was just as big as her wedding. Her departure was the end of an era in the South African music industry, which she dominated for 21 years. She seems to continue dominating the music industry from beyond the grave as witnessed with CDs Malibongwe, Gimme Some Volume, Angiphum’ Endlini as well as the compilation CD titled Love Songs. Nokuzola was posthumously honoured by SAMA with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

According to media reports, the vacuum left by Brenda at EMI/CCP would be filled by a young television actor, Khanyi Mbau. By July 2007 reports indicated the readiness of her album for release. The nation was impatiently waiting for the launch, which was delayed by boardroom politics. The self-titled Afro-soul dance album was ultimately released towards the end of November 2007. Not long thereafter, Khanyi joined Arthur Mafokate’s 999 Music.

After parting ways with Brenda, her band The Big Dudes kept the name alive and continued releasing albums. Dumisane Ngubeni later passed away. In 1986 Sammy Klaas and David Mabaso released The Big Dudes’ debut album, Leave Her Alone, with guest keyboardist Bushy Seatlholo featuring the hit Hamba Uzo Buya as if cherishing the hope that someday Brenda would be back with them. It was followed by Pulling Very Hard with Bushy having joined Sammy featuring the hit Do It. Their 1988 album was No Share For The Boys. All three of their albums had been produced by their old producer, Mally Watson, but their 1989 S’Good S’Nice was produced by Fab Grosso. In 1990 they released Special Feeling featuring young female singer, Mandy. The album was produced by Sammy Klaas. Unfortunately Sammy’s untimely death meant the dying of the flame.

In 1989 Desmond Malotana’s Pisces released Life Is What You Make It on Priority Records’ Style label. He worked with lead guitarist Ralph Martin who also engineered the album. In producing and mixing it, Desmond was assisted by Danny Bridgens.

As for Brenda’s son Bongani Fassie, 2005 was one of his eventful years: at the age of 20 he obeyed the traditional passage to manhood and went to a circumcision school in Langa and also released his own jazz CD Makana Square on his Fassie Records label. By 2006 he was member of Jozi, a jazz funk hip-hop outfit whose other members were Ishmael, Crazy Lu and Da-les. They released their CD Motherland Crunk, which Bongz co-produced. Jozi’s creativity on the hit What’s With Da Attitude? is a perfect sampling of Vusi Ximba’s Wayethin’ Umame?. I love it. Bongz works closely with Ghetto Ruff, the stable that contributed the music for the soundtrack of that award-winning movie Tsotsi that made many South Africans smile, look themselves in the mirror and say: “I am proudly South African!” The movie gave international exposure to the music of Zola, Pitch Black Afro, Brickz, Mapaputsi, Tuks, Drencko, Skomplazi, Ishmael featuring Bongz and others.

Another musician who worked with Brenda in the nineties and became
intimate with her was Ludwe Maki. Four years after her departure Ludwe released a CD titled *Hamba Nezindaba* (2007).

Dephon’s response to CCP’s Brenda Fassie was **Yvonne Chaka Chaka**. Born Yvonne Moloko Machaka in 1965 she grew up in Dobsonville in a family of three girls. Of her two sisters Doreen and Refiloe, it was the latter who encouraged her to sing. Her late father Habakuk Machaka who passed away when she was twelve years old used to sing gospel music, but her favourite musical instrument is the piano. She went into music by default. Her mother’s wish was for her to become a lawyer. Upon completing her Senior Certificate her mother, Sophie Nomakula Machaka, a domestic servant, could not afford the university fees. She had a child to support and somehow she had to earn money. When musician Pat Shange visited her home, she requested that he introduce her to music producers. One thing led to another and before long she was led to Dephon Records where she was introduced to the owner Phil Hollis in February 1985. Phil took her to the studio and handed her over to Attie van Wyk who would be to Yvonne what Malcolm Watson was to Brenda – a long-term producer.

Attie was an experienced musician himself who earlier belonged to a powerful group, Ballyhoo. He would in future be the managing director of the dynamic Big Concerts, which created a festive storm in 2005 when it brought Robbie Williams to South Africa. Yvonne’s first hit was *I’m In Love With A DJ*. It appealed so much to us as deejays and it was almost irresistible in our music compilations. She was a fine young lady who sang her heart out. We secretly fell in love with her though at that stage very few of us had met her. That was Phil’s marketing psychology. But the real deejay behind the voice was that of Leeroy Stone, a character portrayed by Danny Bridgens. Danny later recorded his own music as The Stone or with Taxi.

When I met Yvonne for the first time I liked her, but like all musicians our relationship became that of brother and sister. The Friday I met her at a hotel in Polokwane she was with her concert promoter, Mr Peter Khowana. He later left her in my hands as he had to meet the area’s “relevant structures” to clear some issues about a planned music festival. In those days you could ignorantly walk into trouble by staging a festival sponsored by a company blacklisted or targeted by the unions for labour-related or political reasons. That evening I conducted one of the longest and challenging interviews of my career. Yvonne is a Machaka, which makes her a Motlokwa of the Machaka clan in the former Northern Transvaal. She grew up in Dobsonville and did isiZulu at school. She was to talk to her own people on Radio Lebowa. Our dilemma was to make my listeners believe her when she said she’s a Machaka. We would labour over a question until we were convinced we were ready for recording. Our efforts paid off because that was one of the extracts in the montage that won me an Astera Award in 1986, and that was the interview that endeared her to her fans in the north.
Yvonne’s album *Thank You Mr DJ* went double gold in five weeks. It was the very same strategy; deejays felt appreciated. When Dephon’s long-term PRO, Master Sechele handed copies of the album to us it was like the handing over of certificates of appreciation with a picture of a smiling Yvonne looking straight into your eyes. Dephon had realised with her first record that she only appealed to black South Africans and changed the strategy on this album. Besides the Chicco-composed *I’m Winnie Mandela*, I mean *Winning My Dear Love*, it included two tracks targeted at the white market, *From Me To You* and *I’m Suffering*. For this purpose, Ralph Martin was brought in for the guitar.

Yvonne’s next album *I’m Burning Up*, was really on fire with sirens screaming for help. It was a four-track album and all the tracks were independently powerful. Her *Sangoma* album also featured one of my all-time party dance favourites, *I’m Gonna Stop Loving You*. The siren effect was brought back into her other album *I Cry For Freedom* with the track *Caught Breaking The Law*. My understanding of the strategy behind the concept was that the producers, Attie and Phil, were playing on the tense and hair-raising effect of the siren, which to most people spelled danger – the police, the ambulance or the fire brigade. It immediately captured our attention. It also won the sympathy of the listener who knew what normally happened to people who were dragged into the cold and dark cells for breaking the law. Her album *Be Proud To Be African* featured another massive hit, *Umgombozothi*.

In a short space of time Yvonne Chaka Chaka was South Africa’s most popular musician on the continent. She was a hit in Zimbabwe, Kenya, Gabon, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast (Cote d’Ivoire) and many other countries. It was on her 1990 successful Uganda tour that she earned the name “Princess Of Africa”. To express her appreciation for the overwhelming support she received on the motherland, she released the album *Motherland* as Yvonne Chaka Chaka: Princess Of Africa, engineered by Fernando Perdiao except for the title track that was Richard Mitchell’s product. Multi-talented Fernando also plays guitar and keyboards. Themba Dlamini’s guitar as well as Mike Faure’s saxophone on *Africa Cries* made the album a must for music collectors.

Some of the music practitioners who became part of her music journey besides Sello Twala were engineer Richard Mitchell and songwriter Herbert Xulu. Her 1991 album *The Rhythm Of Life* on the Teal Trutone “Yvonne Chaka Chaka” label featured the hit *Who’s Got The Power* as well as one of her beautiful ballads, *Second Hand Love*. One of the unforgettable performances of her career was her participation in the 1994 “Rhythms Of Africa” show at the Sun City Superbowl where she shared the stage with Rebecca Malope, Sibongile Khumalo and Abdullah Ibrahim, backed by Pure Magic, accompanied by Intsholo (a marimba band) and the National Symphony Orchestra under baton of Richard Cock. Yvonne went back to Sun City the following year for the “Women Of The World Unite Against Drugs And War” gala with some of our powerful female stars. In
1996 she released her clearly patriotic album *The Power Of Africa*.

Her marriage to Dr Mandlalele Tiny Mhinga gave her the support she needed in this hectic business. He was always by her side, even on her tours of the continent. The last time I met her the family lived in Bryanston, Sandton with their sons Ningi, Themba, Mfumo and Mandla. Yvonne is one of the simplest stars I was privileged to know; after a hectic festival performance she’d spend the night at my place in Lebowakgomo but insist that she slept on the hard floor as that would give her a good rest.

In 1997 she came up with an album that paid tribute to her in-laws, *Bombani* (Tiko Rahina). Her other remarkable album is *Yvonne And Friends* (2000). One of the tracks featuring rap artist Tuup is the reggae beat *Slow Down* inspired by a television documentary on the civil war in Sierra Leone. At the 1997 Kora All Africa Music Awards she stole the show in a collaboration with Ringo Madlingozi performing the song *Kana Uchema*. She later won the awards’ Best Arrangement section in 2003. After the passing away of one of Africa’s visionary leaders, former Tanzanian president, “Mwalimu” Julius Nyerere, she paid tribute to him with the track *Mwalimu* in duet with Tsepo Tshola.

Besides her music career she developed an interest in business as well as community development projects. She has also been appointed by UNICEF to be its southern Africa’s regional spokeswoman for malaria. The United Nations Children’s Fund has its African offices in Nairobi, Kenya. She welcomed the appointment, especially as she had just lost backing vocalist Phumzile Ntuli through cerebral malaria after touring Gabon in 2004. She was also appointed a colonel in the South African Air Force. Yvonne is an ambassador for Dr Nelson Mandela’s 46664, a global HIV-Aids awareness and fund-raising campaign named after his prison number. Launched in 2002, its first foreign leg was staged in Tromso, Norway, while the 2007 concert at Ellis Park stadium in Johannesburg also featured The Goo Goo Dolls whose hit *Iris* is my all-time favourite. She also co-presented a programme on talkshow radio station 702 and starred in the popular television series *Ifa Lika Mthethwa*. People close to her will tell you she’s another Mother Theresa, having helped many orphans and needy youngsters especially in funding their education. She is involved with a number of NGOs (non-governmental organisations). In her quest to uplift the underprivileged she enrolled for a Unisa diploma in Adult Education and ended up teaching Management and Administration to adults at Weller School.

Her 2001 CD *Kwenzenjani?* on the Universal Music label was produced by young Gabi “Ibomvu” le Roux who had propelled Mandoza’s music career to greater heights and produced Trybe’s *Shelela* album. Gabi also co-wrote five of the eight tracks on the album. The challenges facing this continent that she loves so dearly inspired the track *Will Africa Change?* In 2005 she was nominated for the Music Of Black Origin Awards in the Best African Act category. Another South African group nominated with her in the MOBO Awards was Ladysmith
Black Mambazo. To celebrate forty years of her life including 20 in the music industry and 17 in marriage, in 2005 she released her 17th album, which was also her first gospel CD, *Celebrate Life*, featuring the tracks *Se Hopole*, *Makholwa* and *Madimone*. She also marked 27 years of the culmination of a prophecy by the late Comforter Frederick Samuel Modise of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church who identified her at the age of 13 as one who would one day travel the world and serenade kings and queens. Throughout her career her image has been that of an African lady and her role models include Miriam Makeba. There is a biography about her titled *Princess of Africa*. Yvonne’s 2007 release was titled *18/28*. Sadly, her mother passed away in 2007 aged 73 and was buried on 4th May at the Roodepoort Cemetery.

Just as Brenda had a long-term backing band The Big Dudes, Yvonne had *Midnight Express*. She also featured on their records like the maxi single *Squeeze Me Baby* as well as their mini album *Everyday Everynight* with three of the four tracks written by Herbert Xulu and engineered by Pikes Cronje. Another stable band that did shows with her was The Groovy Boys whose members included a fine guy called Moreno.

Later Dephon resuscitated Danny Bridgens’s Taxi concept with *The New Taxi*, a band made up of Thabo Aaron (drums); David August (bass synthesiser); Kenneth Mbovane (piano); Winston Dlamini (keyboards) and Victor Khojane (Dr Victor) on lead guitar and lead vocals. Al Etto was their producer.

MFM responded to the fierce competition with two young ladies – Rebecca Malope and Mercy Pakela. The latter to cater for the Pantsula music, the former to service the disco market. Of the two we’ll start with the one who had a short stint with the company, joined CCP and became the best selling artist in gospel music – Rebecca.

**Rebecca Malope** was born Lovederia Batsogile Malope on 30 June 1968 in Lekazi near Nelspruit in Mpumalanga. Her Swazi mother’s name was Pauline Busisiwe (nee Twala) and her Northern Sotho father was John Malope. She started her education at Masihambisane Primary School. At the age of twelve she was already a lead vocalist in a local Mbaqanga group, Luvelo Lemaswati, which was so powerful it won competitions organised by the local radio station. In those competitions one of the participating groups was led by Dan Nkosi from Ermelo. Dan requested her elder sister Cynthia to bring the talented Rebecca to join his band, but by the time the two girls went to Ermelo the band had split. The band’s former lead guitarist who was from Evaton convinced Cynthia and her 15-year-old sister to travel there with him as he knew a man who owned musical instruments. On arrival the man indeed provided them with the instruments and a shack as accommodation for the eleven-member group. In 1985, Sizwe Zako, a member of the band AFUBI, originally from Port Elizabeth, was one of the judges in The Shell Road To Fame talent search. Among the contestants was the young Batsogile Malope backed by her band, Safika. Though
Batsogile did not win the competition, Sizwe realised the immense potential in the young girl. After the contest he travelled to Evaton and brought the two sisters to Orlando in Soweto. Here they lived in a church mission house where Sizwe also stayed. While at this mission house in 1986 the young Batsogile joined the Congregational Church Choir as lead vocalist. They recorded an album, *Ithemba Lam*, but did not release it in order to allow the young vocalist to qualify for the 1987 talent search. The result? She won in the Best Female Vocalist category! Some of the “midwives” who saw her through the competition were Tu Nokwe and Mara Louw who dressed her for the show. The song she performed was *Shine On* composed for her by Sizwe. At this point it had become necessary for her to adapt to the politics of the industry. Her two names did not impress her first record company in 1988 and she had to supply them with an “acceptable” name. She gave them Rebecca, the name of a character she loved from the Bible and the name by which the world would know her for the rest of her life. Lovederia’s first album was *Rebecca*. It included *Shine On* as well as the dance-floor hit *Cheat*. Her live performances were just magic, pure magic as fans danced with “Twinky Twinky”. Concert promoters knew that a festival was incomplete without the magic of Rebecca, Brenda, Yvonne, Mercy Pakela and Ebony. Each one of them had a huge following. Rebecca, Sizwe and music agent Peter Tladi formed a partnership that lasted for many years and yielded results beyond their wildest dreams.

In 1989 she released *Woza Lovey*, an album co-produced by Sizwe Zako and Bones Brettell on the MFM label. Sizwe composed all the tracks using his pseudonym, Qocwa. Most of them were dance floor tunes like the title track as well as *O Nketsang Moratuwa* and the hit *Ma “G” Men*. But the track that somehow gave an indication of things to come was *Sithembele Kuwe*, a gospel ballad sung straight from the heart. The song had been written by Sizwe not necessarily knowing who would sing it; he later insisted that it should be included on Rebecca’s album. Her backing vocalists were her sister Cynthia Malope, Mbulelo Phahlane and fellow Shell Road To Fame product, Princess Mthembu. The public response to the gospel track was so huge that a deliberate decision was taken to include gospel songs in her following albums. Her 1989 album *Thank You Very Much* was still in line with the previous one with dance tracks led by the hit *Holiday Vibe*. There was still one track that pointed the way forward – *Izono Zam*. Sizwe was still the producer as well as the composer. Backing vocalists were new except for one, her sister Cynthia. As the title speaks for itself, it was meant to thank all those who contributed towards the attainment of her goal – to sing and record music. But there was one big surprise – her record label. She had left MFM for CCP on the Family label, a label also used by Brenda Fassie for a long time. It was on her album *Buyani* (1990) where the real Rebecca Malope started to show her true colours – more relaxed, more matured and more than one gospel track; a gospel star was emerging. The album was dedicated to our
brothers and sisters who had been in exile for so many years and it was time to come back home to the new democratic South Africa. Her backing band was the group that would be with her for many years to come, Pure Magic, a group started by Sizwe Zako at MFM where they had hits like *Taximan* (1984). In 1991 she had a big disco hit *Saturday Nite* from the album of the same name, but what was even more telling was that it had more gospel songs than any other previous album. On it was a track appealing for peace in the midst of the political violence that followed the release of Dr Nelson Mandela. Those who clung to the past wished him away and those who wanted change thought the take over was too slow. Rebecca’s unprecedented impact on gospel music in South Africa is further explored in the chapter “Praying And Praising”.

The following are her winning albums before she went 100% gospel:

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>1988</td>
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There is one female singer who dominated the Pantsula dance scene both on records and live shows. She ultimately earned the title “Queen of the Pantsulas”. Daughter of a priest, **NOMSA MERCY PAKELA** arrived in Johannesburg in 1982 from New Brighton, Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape searching for stardom and she got just that. She had started singing back home at the age of sixteen. After a stint with Lena Khama and Girlie Mafura as Ebony, she signed a contract with MFM. In 1986 she released *Ndizo Kulinda* and followed up with sizzlers like *I Will Hold On* and *Respect*. There are three men who’ll always be associated with the success of her musical career – Bones Brettell, Bernie Millar and Godfrey Nzuza. They were her production team. These producers were complimented by Sipho Mshazi’s song writing talent. Her 1987 album *I’m Yours* contained six tracks that could each stand on their own as hits. The track titles on the A side were also translated into her home language, isiXhosa. It was at live concerts that the impact of her music on her fans was immense as “Tunkie Tunkie” danced as if her life depended on it. Her 1988 album *Run Baby Run* featured one of the hottest hits of her career, *Ayashis ’Amateki* (This is not my size). This was the track that earned her the title “Queen of the Pantsulas”. The album also featured a gospel dance track *Thank You Jesus* in duet with stable mate Ali Katt. Her marketing and promotions team of Peter Tladi and Elias Moloi travelled far and wide to see to the success of this album. In the same year she released *Mafia*, an album featuring two hits *Careless Doctor* and *It Hurts So Bad*. Festival groovers went crazy when she performed the former as in the middle of the song she
would start singing and gesticulating “Ichoo! Mamma we…solo sa ntlhaba!” On this album Ishmael Mgaese replaced Godfrey Nzuza on the production team and also wrote some tracks including the two hits as well as the title track. In 1989 Godfrey was back with the production team in the recording studio cooking Mercy’s next album, *Young And Beautiful* featuring the hit *Taximan* as well as the title track. One of the tracks celebrated the building of the biggest stadium in the country, Soccer City. My personal favourite is her *Queen Of The Disco*.

By 1990 she had moved from her known stable and her album *Mama Ndiyalila* was produced and arranged by Sello Chicco Twala on Dephon’s Roy B label. Almost all the tracks were written by Chicco. Included was Chicco’s re-mix of Mercy’s old mega-hit, *I Will Hold On*. From here Mercy’s music career suffered some setbacks and her personal life experienced endless blows. Her mother died tragically. In the process she turned to the Hare Krishna movement after reading *The Science Of Self Realization*, a book written by the founder of the movement, AC Baktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, for spiritual support. In 1994 she emerged with another album, *Ngithol’ New Love* which was mostly featuring ballads. In 1997 she released *Khotso*, an album initiated by Zinzi Soul Music. For some time her fans waited for her next album until Primedia released her new 14-track CD, *Mama*, in 1999. This CD was a concerted effort to resuscitate her fading career. It was produced by four credible musicians: Don Laka, Johnny Clegg, Jimmy Bangura and Gong Master. The compositions ranged from Caiphus Semenya’s to Joe Mogotsi’s. In 2005 she announced her signing with Creative Kingdom Records for Afro-Pop projects. By 2007 she was in demand for live shows. I still remember that on 31 March that year she was billed for the Golden Oldies Music Festival at Polokwane Showgrounds. On 7 April she performed at the Thaba Nchu Easter Music Festival. She also went into the 999 recording studios with Chomee for a collaboration project. In 2007 through the help of Bonsai Entertainment she released *Ndibuyile* (I’m Back).

In 1984 when I heard the track *Stop Fooling Around* I hardly suspected that the voice leading the song would one day be so loved that fans would scream at the top of their voices asking for more at Lena Khama’s live concerts. At that stage she was with the group Lena and Sunshine and the song was written and produced by Enoch Nondala on the Sunrise label.

Lindruela Khama was born in 1964 in Nkowankowa near Tzaneen in Limpopo Province. She started singing at a young age as she joined a Phalaborwa group, The Big Cats whose members included the late Paul Ndlovu. In 1980 on New Year’s Eve the Mthembu Queens were performing in the area and she joined them. Upon arriving in Johannesburg she met other musicians who appealed to her style of singing. In 1982 Bheki Ngcobo asked her to marry him. Bheki, a popular maskandi musician cum praise singer known as Ihashi Elimhlophe (White Horse) is an energetic fabulous dancer. After a stint with Kori Moraba of The Minerals, Lena joined Dudu Mazibuko of Dudu And The Big Time
Boys. She also worked with Abangani. Girlie Mafura who was from Orlando East also did backing vocals for Dudu And The Big Time Boys. She introduced Lena to a song writer who played for the Afro Funk And Blues Investigation (AFUBI), Sizwe Zako. They met at 2 Dorkay House, Eloff Street where Sizwe was experimenting on some songs he had written. The two lasses sang to his music and he was impressed. That was in 1985. He paid a visit to RPM with the demo tapes of his music featuring the fresh young voices of Lindueltia and Girlie. RPM thought there was potential and Sizwe, together with Street Kids producer Raymond Phiri, took the girls into the studio. The result was a maxi single *I Need Somebody*. On another track, *You and Me Together*, Ray Chikapa Phiri joined them on vocals to create a dialogue. The duo was named Ebony – two beautiful black girls. The disband of Joy in May 1983 created an opportunity for prospective female groups. Ebony filled the vacuum. Peter Tladi who was Promotions Manager at RPM Records at that time marketed the debut maxi aggressively and serious attention was given to also market it internationally as the potential was obvious. They shared backing band Stimela with the Street Kids at live concerts. By the way, Street Kids were Paul Ndlovu and Oupa Poho. Later Mercy Pakela had a stint with Ebony to make it a trio. Rebecca Malope also worked with the group, which was managed by Peter Tladi. Lena would ultimately be known as Ebony. Another maxi single was released with two hot tracks co-written by Sizwe Zako and Godfrey Nzuza. They were *Tell Me Why* and *Do You Remember?* produced by Ray Phiri and engineered by “Mr Magic” Richard Mitchell. A four-track mini album, *Ice Cream Man*, written and produced by Ray Phiri and engineered by Philip Nel followed in the same year. It featured the hit *I'm A Winner*, and indeed she was. One of Ebony’s powerful tracks is a Jabu Sibumbe/Peter Pearlson composition, *Who’s Wrong, Who’s Right* from *Feeling Good* (1987), an album they co-produced with Thapelo Khomo and Peter Moticoe. *Ooh La La Hop* also had remarkable success. Her 1992 album *Keep This Love* was produced and arranged by Thapelo Khomo who also wrote most of the tracks. The engineer was Tom Fox. She had a vernacular dance hit, *Andina Ku Lawulwa Nguwe*. One of her hottest albums, *Tshunela*, was produced by her homeboy, the late Peta Teanet. It was so popular that they released *Tshunela Volume 2*, which included the hit *Khoma Khoma* in 1992 on RPM's Tiger label. In the 1980s there was no female dancer for Ebony. I remember her combination with Vinolia Mashego at festivals – magic beyond words!

Taking after their parents, Lena and Bheki’s four children have their own music group **Amaponi**. The group is made up of the two boys and the two girls: Nathi, Jabu, Ntombi and Vusiwe. It is always interesting to me to notice the dual meaning of the group’s name. Amaponi is isiZulu for small horses (ponies), which means they are the offspring of the White Horse (Ihashi Elimhlophe). But again, in pronunciation Amaponi could as well be the children of (E)Bony. In February 1994 Gallo Record Company released a compilation CD of Lena’s hits
called *The Best Of Ebony*. By 2005 she was managing the family music business, but expressed her intention to go back to her first love – music performances.

**Girlie Mafura** also went solo. This girl from Orlando East started singing in 1983 doing backing vocals for Dudu Mazibuko of Dudu And The Big Time Boys. Their albums include *What Is A Woman*. One of the group’s hits was *Umpefumlo Wam*. Her musical career is almost like that of Lena Khama. She started with Sizwe Zako and later in her career was produced by Limpopo musician, the late Peta Teanet. Girlie released *I’m Still Waiting* (1987) written and produced by Sizwe and engineered by Humphrey Mabote on RPM’s Right Track label. It was followed by Udlala Ngami (1988) as well as Girlie (1989) written and produced by Lefty Rhikoto and Peter Njobe on RPM’s Tiger label. Her Other albums were *Gimme Your Love* (1991) produced by Peta Teanet, *Ku Cheza Na Wewe* (1992), *Thuso* (1993) and *Masela* (1995). She’ll always be remembered for her monster hit, *Mshengu Ville*.

**Patricia Majalisa** also took the music industry by storm backed by Dan Tshanda’s band, Splash. She was born in the South African boxing capital township of Mdantsane in East London. When she arrived in Johannesburg in the eighties she joined Splash as a backing vocalist on their album *Peacock* (1986) produced by Hamilton “Vala” Nzimande and engineered by Dave Segal on the Gallo label. Hamilton realised that she was too talented to remain a backing vocalist and recommended that she should embark on a solo career backed by the same band. He produced her album *Cool Down*, which sold over 25 000 copies and as they say, the rest is history. From this album one of the tracks *Mshoza* became her other name. The name is the feminine gender of “Pantsula” in township lingo. Later her producer became the band producer, Daniel Tshanda. The success of her career is a partnership with Dan “Dalom” Tshanda and Dave Segal. Her subsequent albums sold at the minimum of 50 000 units each.

The next album *Poverty* was written and produced by Dan, backed by the stable’s young trio Dalom Kids on vocals and the band Splash. Hotline’s lead guitarist, Alistair Coakley was roped in for his rock guitar effect on tracks *I Better Go Home* and *Great Pain*. Her other albums include *Dzhengenzhe*, *Witchdoctor*, *Gimba*, *Cowards*, *Umona*, *Impumelelo*, *My Music* and *Ithemba Lami*. She was popular with fans at festivals where she performed as part of the Dan Tshanada package of Splash, Patricia Majalisa and Dalom Kids. Once they took the stage, they would perform in turns until the whole package was done. One of her best performances at live shows was her rendition of *Uwee* from the 1990 album *Dzhengenzhe*. The fans just loved it! So easy to sing and dance to. By 1990 she was in love with Dan Tshanda, but the relationship could not stand the test of time. In 1994 she announced that she was leaving “The Package”. According to reports, Dan Tshanda had given Patricia and Matshikos (an off-shoot of Splash) his blessings to work on their own. Her “independent” album was the product
of herself and Pennuel Kunene of Matshikos. In August 2005 she announced her return to Dalom Kids Productions where she released the CD *Batšha* (GRC) working with her old producer, Dan Tshanda.

**Ntombi Ndaba** was another female star of note in the eighties. Her career will always be associated with her manager and producer “Rubber” AT Khoza as well as her backing band, Survival. In 1985 she released two self-written maxi singles *I Can’t Let Him Go* and *Think More About Me* produced by Clive Risko and engineered by Jan Smit on Reamusic’s Ream label. The year 1987 found her at CCP Records releasing a Rubber Khoza produced and arranged album *What Is It With Me* (Yini Ngami) with all the tracks self-written and engineered by Fab Grosso on CCP’s Hi-Trax label. Another big hit of hers was *Sweet Love* from the self-written album of the same name recorded at Blue Tree Studios and released on the CCP label. In 1989 her backing band released its own album *The Big Mechanics* under the name The Survivals on the Anneko label. This stable was also home to Sinah Dombolo and The Derricans who in 1989 released their album *Mahlalela* under the management of Derrick Phuluwa.

In the late eighties when SABC radio was involved in raising funds for welfare organisations during the festive season, I had the honour of engaging musicians in the live performances that accompanied the campaign. One of the musicians was **Nana Moloi**, deejay Pabi Moloi’s mother. She released two albums with EFP, from which she featured tracks like *Sekoloto* and many others. Nana was not only a musician, but a talented showbiz personality who co-hosted a television music programme and won a Star Tonight Award for her excellence in presentation. Her debut movie was Bertha Egnos’s *Ipi Tombi* for which she was nominated Best Leading Actress in the M-Net Awards. As if that was not enough, Edgars Club Members nominated this model of note as the Best Female Personality. An ex-partner of CJB’s Neo Maphaka, I guess what remains in many people’s minds is her face as SABC 2’s continuity presenter.

Elizabeth Mkhwanazi was introduced to Hit City Records by her Mpumalanga homeboy, Dan Nkosi. As a professional singer she used the name **Zizi Kongo**. The biggest hit of her career was *Come Duze* from the album of the same name on Hit City’s Leopard Records label. Her other albums with Hit City Records included *Emarabini* and *Isilingo* co-produced by John Galanakis and Hebert Xulu. By 1995 she was at Ken Haycock’s Cool Spot where she released *Ibhandishi* co-produced by Quinton Madlala and Vusi Shange. On 24 September 2006 Zizi was one of the musicians who participated in the Kungwini Cultural Festival in Bronkhorstpruit.

**Lorraine Staple**’s solo career was Lloyd Lelosa’s dream. Her real name was Lorraine Sibisi. In 1984 Lloyd and producer Richard Siluma released her debut maxi single *On The Road Again* backed by Isaac Mtshali on drums. It was engineered by Richard Mitchell on Teal Records’ Plum Records label. Its flipside was another hot track, *Let The Music Move Me*. Her 1985 album *You Belong To*
Me was a joint effort of many experts: Richard Siluma, Lloyd Lelosa, Ray Phiri, Isaac Mtshali, Bakithi “BK” Khumalo, Nelcy Sedibe and Nana Motijoane. It was engineered by Richard Mitchell, Sam Wingate and David Segal. The album included tracks from her debut maxi single. In 1986 the album Here I Come (Sizolala La) was produced by Richard Siluma and engineered by David Segal who also co-arranged it and released it on the Gallo label. Her music was the alternative of the time to Disco music. She had a mellow voice and her style of singing reminded one of Mavis Staples of The Staple Singers.

Bulelwa Arosi has been a member of groups like CJB and Taboo. The two groups shall be discussed in other sections of this book. She used the name Buli or Bulelwa Arosi as a solo artist. One man who has worked extensively with her is Thami Mdluli. Her solo albums include Oh Boy!, which was co-produced by Richard Makhubele (Volcano) and S. Higgins who also engineered it. It was released on Eric Frisch Productions’ FG label.

Buli’s sister, Suthukazi Arosi was a member of Madoda Malotana’s duo, Ashante and later she followed Busi Mhlongo (formerly Vicky) abroad. She also performed as a session vocalist and backed other musicians like Caiphus Semenya. In fact she is very prominent in Caiphus’s 1994 video, Woman’s Got A Right To Be with Condy Ziqubu strumming the big guitar.

Born in Cala, Transkei in the Eastern Cape, Suthu’s interest in music was kindled at a very young age. To reinforce her skills she studied ballet and modern jazz in Cape Town. When she went to Johannesburg her other talent became very handy as she joined Gibson Kente’s cast to play roles in his stage productions. Some of the productions she took part in were Laduma, which was part of the World Indigenous Music Festivals as well as The Game. She recorded with groups like Cheek To Cheek, Kora Best Traditional Group, Mahube and Kora 97 winning group, Sabela. She became a member of a duet called Oshakati in the late eighties. In 1990 she released Umzi Watsha, an album she co-wrote and produced with Dougmore Madoda Malotana of Cheek To Cheek on CCP’s Bullet label. On the album she uses the name Suthu and thanks her mother Yolisa, sister Buli and daughter Lolo, as well as her own son Lifa for always being there for her. In 2001 she released a 10-track CD, U-Buntu, on the Sheer Sound label produced by herself with the help of Andile Yenana and Herbie Tsoueli. It was engineered by Peter Pearlson. She also released Ayeza and The Journey, which was produced by D-Rex. Suthukazi’s awards as an individual musician, part of a group or actor include:

- Best Leading Actress in the 1997 FNB Vita Awards for The Game.
- Best Female Artist: southern Africa in the Kora All Africa Music Awards.
- Best African Pop Album nomination in FNB SAMA 5 for Mahube.
- Best Female Artist nomination in the 2004 MTN SAMA.
I recently saw Winnie Khumalo perform as a backing vocalist for Ringo Madlingozi in the East Comes Alive Concert at Birchwood Hotel in Boksburg. My mind went back to the year 1988 when the small girl released her self-titled debut album featuring the hit Hey Lightie written by Anthony Mthembu, recorded and produced by Mally Watson on CCP’s Family label. By 1991 her producer was Sello “Chicco” Twala on her Tshinatshina album engineered by Marvin Moses and released on CCP’s Flame label. One of her best songs is her cover version of the old smash hit Dlamini.

Vinolia Mashego who became known as V-Mash will always be remembered as the tigress of SABC television’s youth programme, Jam Alley. But when “Om” Alec Khaoli met her he saw a music performer with massive potential. Her debut album The Hunger (GRC, 1988) was co-written and co-produced by Alec Khaoli and Colin Smith featuring the hits Set Me Free and It’s In The Liquor Bottle. Her album Cheena (1991) produced hits like Suna Papa and Cheena. A fabulous dancer, she was popular with music fans at festivals. She would thrill them by dancing energetically and all of a sudden start trembling from head to toe. As the crowd went wild she would sing “Nna nka jaiva o hlanye” (I can drive you crazy with my dancing act). As already alluded to, she also became an award winning television presenter in her Jam Alley days. This was a weekend vibrant youth music variety programme. After a lot of negative publicity regarding her private life, she was replaced by Zanele Nestum Nyakale of 999 group, Abashante who later also left the show only to join Lesedi FM’s Chomane Chomane on his morning show, “Ha Reye” (Let’s Go) in 2006. Some of the hot presenters of the vibrant television show included Nimrod Nkosi, Pushie Dunn and Twasa Seoke of Lesedi FM who was a musician in her own right.

From the same production house of Alec Khaoli emerged Andile Gaeleshewe from Meadowlands, Soweto. She was catapulted to overnight stardom by her hit Abuti Yo. Her 2000 album Andile also produced by “Om” Alec Khaoli was inspired by issues close to her heart – child abuse and HIV/AIDS awareness. She also hosted a radio programme on the youth radio station YFM where she was able to engage the youth on the above-mentioned issues. At the station she met Udo Carelse from Cape Town whom she later married. In 2001 she established the Open Disclosure Foundation encouraging abused youth to speak out. In 2005 she announced the October release of her album It’s Me Now on her own record label. Andile’s awards include the Clinton Democracy Fellowship (youth leadership) as well as the Ashoka Fellowship (social entrepreneurship). By 2006 the gender activist who personally survived childhood abuse was co-hosting a Pan-African youth talk show with Sizwe Dhlomo on MTVBase titled MTV-Base Uncensored. At the end of November of the same year she became host of a TV reality show titled Khumbul’Ekhaya on SABC 1. In 2008 she was nominated for the Woman of The Year Award.

Born Khanyisile Maphumulo, Khanyo has paid her dues as a backing vocalist
in South Africa helping other musicians achieve gold and platinum sales. Like Mandisa Dlanga, Stella Khumalo, Star Mabaso, Beulah Hashe, Deborah Fraser, Thandi Seoka and the late Phumzile Ntuli her name appears on many albums of substance including those of Jabu Khanyile and Kutu. She entered the world of showbiz at a tender age and travelled the world with Mbongeni Ngema’s Sarafina cast. In fact, she was groomed by Mbongeni. When I first met her in 1997 she was a member of a duo called Tiny And Khanyo, singing with Ermelo-born Tiny Siluma who was by no means tiny. The duo’s hit single was Emotions. Her debut solo album I’ll Be There was produced by Mandla Mofokeng, Mthunzi Namba, Alexis Faku and Ezbee. It featured the hit Isiphithiphithi as well as a cover version of Two Tons Of Fun’s Just Us. It was followed in 1999 by Iyangibiza, which was produced by Joe Nina. In 2005 she walked into that monumental beehive, Downtown Studios, and came out with another album, Let My Heart Sing (Catwalk Records).

Sadly, Tiny Siluma was gunned down on the sixth floor of his Wanderers Street, Joubert Park, Johannesburg flat corridor on 9 June 2008. The nation received the bad news on the morning of the Million Man March Against Crime in Tshwane. Just before the start of the march four suspects were apprehended by the police in connection with the killing. How sad to lose our prophets to bullets and guns! Producer Richard Siluma’s cousin, Tiny whose 1998 debut album was titled Caroline was buried on Saturday, 14 June 2008 at Lenasia Cemetery. Many South Africans will remember Motha Obed Tiny Siluma as the big man in the Chicken Licken television commercial with comedian Joe Mafela.

Pamela Nkutha had a number of albums at On Record including her 1988 Umntanami (Kidnapped) produced by Steve Cooks and engineered by David Moloele. Some of her hits included Manano (1990).

Deborah Fraser worked with various musicians as a backing vocalist. In 1990 she recorded her debut solo album Doctor’s Prescription: Make Love 3 Times A Day using the name Debs Fraser. The album was produced and arranged by the late Dumisani Ngubeni and engineered by Ian Osrin. On that album one track Abanye Bayombona was an indication of her gospel music inclination. Later she became a celebrated gospel superstar. Her gospel music career will come under the spotlight in the last chapter of this book.

Ntokozo Masinga released her music with Sony Music South Africa under the name Ntokozo. In one interview she told me that there was a time when she could not decide whether to model or sing. She arrived on the music scene when the industry was under siege from kwaito music. Some of her hits include Cruisin’, Never Gonna Give You Up, Flavour Of The Old School, The World To Me, You’re Losing as we as All I Need from her album Do It. These hits were composed by Lindelani Mkhize and Gabi le Roux and produced with the help of Tim White. Her hits were remixed in 1998 on one CD titled Ntokozo: ‘98 Remixes. During the
2000 festive season she released *Keep It Real*, which had tracks like *Welele Mama* and *Umcimbi*.

**Tsakani Mhinga** aka TK was one powerful songstress with a bright future ahead of her. Her album *TKO* (Township Records) was SAMA 7’s Best R&B Album. The self-titled Tsakani (Universal Records, 2001), which was produced by Pete Martin is testimony of her star qualities. The album was nominated in the Best Producer category of the Standard Bank SAMA 8 and won the R&B section. Other albums include *Black Butterfly* (Electro Mode, 2003). Her six-album deal with a major international record company spoke volumes about her credibility as a musician. Sadly, TK was found dead in a Bryanston hotel room on Monday, 27 February 2006 just before she could cross that boundary of 27. She was laid to rest at the Fourways Cemetery, leaving behind her son, Oratile. On Friday, 29 September 2006, her record label Electromode and SABC 2 launched her album *Best of TK* at The Venue, Melrose Arch in Johannesburg. Amongst those who graced the event were musicians Mandoza, Danny K, Wandle, Ed Jordan as well as her mother, Tebogo Mhinga. Public opinion suggested that the gap she left in the local R&B genre would be taken care of by the likes of former 999 music singing sensation, Lira.

Born **Lerato Molapo** in Daveyton, Benoni, Lira’s debut R&B CD was *All My Love* (2000). After parting ways with her first stable, 999 Records in 2006 she joined Sony BMG. She released a hot CD titled *Feel Good*, which won Lara Hollis SAMA 13’s Best Music Video category, a feat repeated in 2007 for the video track *Ixesa*. Sounds good – Lira and Lara. It also won the SAMA 14’s Top Selling Download category. No wonder the album had already won the 8th Metro FM Music Awards’ Best Jazz Album category. Her inclusion in the March 2007 line-up of The Cape Town International Jazz Festival was confirmation that her star was on the rise.

One of the new generation of stars is **KB** aka Keabetswe Motsilenyane. Born on 8 April 1979, she grew up in Saulspoort, North West province and studied music and theatre at Mmabana Cultural Centre in Mafikeng. She later enrolled with the University Of Pretoria for the same courses. The talented KB was in African Footprint until 2001, when she got a role in Ali, a movie starring Will Smith. Most people took note of her in e-tv’s Backstage. Her debut album Beautiful Vibrations (2002) featured the hit, *O a Lla*. It scooped several awards including Metro FM’s Best R&B Singer and Best Newcomer as well as SAMA 9’s Best R&B Album. She followed up with *Rock Lefatshe* (Universal Music, 2003), which won Metro FM Music Awards’ Best R&B Singer and Best Female Vocalist. As if that was not enough, it was nominated in the Kora All Africa Music Awards for Best Female Singer: southern Africa. In 2005 she released another hot album titled El Musica through New York’s Yoruba Records featuring her mother Vera on the track *Roots*. A track from the album, *How Come I’m Not Feeling You*, was nominated for the 2005 Metro FM Music Awards’ R&B category, a section also contested...
by Lee Ann as well as Khalil, whose *Wantempta* remains one of my favourites. Keabetswe won the Best Female Artist category, while Lee Ann walked away with the R&B section. In 2005 KB was also nominated for the Best Female Artist: southern Africa category of the tenth Kora All Africa Music Awards. It was while shooting the SABC 1 drama *Mthunzini* that her fans learned she was expecting her first child with her long-term boyfriend and manager, producer Terry Pinana. In 2006 after giving birth to Phala, the multi-talented KB returned to the stage featuring in theatre production *Aladdin* at the Civic Theatre. In July 2007 she featured in e-tv's *Rhythm City* and went on to release her next album *My Rhythm*. How's that for a lady who also co-owned a company called “Mathemo”? Maybe that's what she meant when she sang “Rock Lefatshe”.

**Linda ‘Babe’ Majika**’s musical history goes back to the early days of Tembisa’s Hot Soul Singers. As a solo artist her debut album was *Don’t Treat Me So Bad* (Umkhonto Records, 1988) produced by Ace Mbuyisa. It was followed by *It’s So Hard* (Kuyakhuphukela) in 1989. Her backing vocalists on that album included one of her former Hot Soul Singers mates, Ntombifuthi Mabaso as well as Lizzy Mngomezulu of Zia fame. Albums of the lady born Linda Ndlovu include *Themba Lami* (RPM Records).

**Neo Saka** aka Neo Seakamela released her debut album with RPM Records titled *Time Will Tell*. It was followed by *Majapane* (Gallo Records) and *Bopedi* (2003). She also became a popular radio presenter at Thobela FM especially for her co-presentation of “The Neo-Joe Show” with Joe Mabotja, a former actor in Mbongeni Ngema’s *Sarafina*.

Another lady deejay, **Unathi Nkayi** known for her days with youth station YFM started with collaborations and features like Zola’s track *Sana Lwami* and DJ Vetkuk vs Mahoota’s compilation CD. Unathi who grew up in places like Namibia and London did drama and journalism at Rhodes University. After presenting the *Castle Loud Show* on television she joined YFM and co-presented the youth station’s “Kamikaze Heat Show” with Mvulane “Rudeboy” Paul Mnisi. She later became a respected compère, singer, deejay and presenter who’s an ambassador for Dr Nelson Mandela’s 46664 campaign. In 2005 the lass from Grahamstown released her debut album *My First Time* featuring the hit, *Buti*. At the end of 2006 she left Getto Ruff to join Kalawa Jazmee where she recorded her second CD. Her former co-presenter, Mnisi from Katlehong had also presented a television show called *Ecovision*, joined community radio station Voice Of Soweto and joined YFM at the age of 18 in 1997. He is also into music production and poetry. By 2007 Unathi had joined Metro FM where she co-presented the station’s afternoon show with Glen Lewis, while her former colleague Thomas “Badboy T” Msingana also joined the urban radio station to do the morning show.

Ashante aka **Lindiwe MphoBole** was born on 13 February 1963 in East London. She joined Gibson Kente’s Theatrical Company and learned the basics of singing,
theatre, dance and stage. In 1985 she arrived in Johannesburg where she joined CJB as a backing vocalist and dancer. She later joined Harari and Sipho Mabuse as a supporting act. Her debut album *Chains Of Love* was produced by Peter Moticoe, Tsietsi Mafabatho as well as Joseph Dumako on Umkhonto Records. Later in her career she was produced by the late Peta Teanet.

**Esta M** is a former teacher from Chiawelo, Soweto whose 1994 debut album was *Sakamela*. With Shangaan music producer Joe Shirimane she released 8 albums. At the end of 2005 she released *Norho* (A Dream) with the help of producers Frans Africa and Muzilikazi Wa Afrika.

Maybe I should also pay tribute to young ladies who recorded and released songs but due to a variety of reasons were not able to sustain the momentum, as well as those whose careers were just budding when I wrote this book.

Julia Mabika who had a massive hit *Be My Wife*, produced by Dane Stevenson on the Blue Tree label. Nomuntu Kappa released *Come And Satisfy Me* in 1990 produced and arranged by Thapelo Khomo who wrote almost all the songs. The album was engineered by Ian Osrin on the Roy B label. Thandi Zulu aka TZ Junior at Dephon Records had a big hit *Move Me* produced by Peter Moticoe on Dephon’s Roy B label.

Also from this stable was Sister Blaze aka Maureen Tsotetsi who had a hit with *Number Two Two Seven* in 1989 from an album of the same name on the Roy B label. It was followed by her 1990 sizzler, *We Can Differ But Still Be Friends*.

Margino had a hit *You Took My Love* in 1985 and an album titled *Happy People*.

Tshepiso Mthembu who was born in Mzimhlophe, Soweto, to Maki Mthembu on 20 September 1965 already showed interest in music as a student at Anchor High School in Meadowlands. She started her showbiz career singing, dancing and acting in Gibson Kente’s play *Things Are Bad, Mzala*. She later became a backing singer for Lazarus Kgagudi. It was as a backing artist for Kamazu and Eric D that William Mthethwa noticed her. In 1991 he produced her album, *Mashwabana* at Teal Records.

Sister H released Wa Didiela on RPM’s Tiger label in 1991. It was co-written and produced by Lefty Rhikoto and Ali Maake; Ian Osrin was the engineer.

Lady Thuli released *Living In Africa* in 1990, an album written, produced and arranged by Themba Mawelela aka Little Big Man on the On Record label. She released the hit *Int’ Wencane* as part of the duo Tools And Figs in 1991.

Matshidiso Mokoena became known as a member of a trio known as Xilembe. In 1989 they released an album titled *Ncilò Ncilò* on Cool Spot’s Tops label. When Xilembe split in early 1991, she went solo using the name, Tshidi. Her debut album was *Ni Famba Na Wena* (Cool Spot, 1991) featuring the hit *Matshidiso* produced by Mally Watson.

Still with Cool Spot, Queen Yende fronted trio, Venus. The other members of the group were Richard Chauke and Peter Tshehla. *Soul Train* (1990) was their album, which was also produced by the in-house maestro, Mally Watson.
Miranda Maila in 1988 released her album *What Are You Waiting For?* produced by Julius Tokolloho on the Sounds Of Soweto label, engineered by Tom Maybury. The album includes a soliloquy ballad, *I Can’t Believe It’s Over (Our Love Was So Strong).*

Seipati Mkwanazi released her solo debut album in 1997. She had acted in a drama series in 1989 and appeared in various television advertisements. Seipati was also appointed as the Lux spokesperson and had her own column in *Thandi* magazine.

Adelle First’s music was produced and arranged by Tom Mkhize on the Solid Records label. She had hits like *Dance With me* and *Don’t Give Up* in 1986.

Dorcas Maloi released her album *Something Special* on the Priority label in 1985 produced by the late Jabu Moses Dlamini and engineered by Greg Cutler, Humphrey Mabote and Lloyd Ross.

Zandi Makeba’s 1989 album, *Overload,* was written and produced by Godfrey Nzuza and engineered by Richard Mason on the MFM label.

Ntombi Yomsuthu aka Angie Gumbi in 1994 released *Xola Nhliziyo* through Teal Records. She co-wrote the music with her husband Richard Felani Gumbi who was also the engineer and executive producer of the album. The late West Nkosi produced the CD assisted by Edho Mabuza and Vusi Tladi.

Fifteen-year-old Kandi King aka Kandi K was assisted by her musician father, Claude King to release her self-titled ten-track album in 1990. The album was arranged, programmed and produced by Claude. It was engineered by Peter Pearlson on Tusk label.

Cy-Zaah released *Life Is Too Short* produced and arranged by Ishmael “Spokes H” Hlatswayo on the RPM label in 1994.

Khululiwe Sithole, a backing singer for Bayete started singing with a gospel group, Goings, at the age of 16. The name of the group was later changed to Jama. In Johannesburg she joined Mbongeni Ngema’s Committed Artists and featured in the plays *Sarafina* and *Township Fever.* She later backed musicians like Ray Phiri, Busi Mhlongo, Letta Mbulu, Caiphus Semenya and Jonas Gwangwa. After recording the *Mmalo-We* album with Jabu Khanyile, she found herself a home in Bayete. In 1997 she released her own CD *Isondlo* on the Teal Records label. It was produced by her late husband, Jabu Khanyile. The music was written by Jabu Khanyile, Godfrey Pilane, Mthandeni Mvelase and Dumisani Dlamini. By 2008 after the death of her husband she released her follow-up CD, *Iminjunju.*

Elle aka Relebogile Tisane from Atterigdeville in Tshwane got her name from the French “She”, but she is a Tswana lady. In 2002 she won SAMA’s Best African Pop Album category for *Is’khathi – Time.* Her other album, *Front Cover,* featured her versions of Brenda’s *Life Is Going On* as well as Letta Mbuli’s *There’s Music In The Air.* The album was nominated in MTN SAMA 11’s Best R&B Album category, which was also contested by musicians like Khalil (*Experience Khalil*)
and Nana (*Five Loaves And Two Fish*). The multi-talented lass hosted a radio show, played a lead role in stage play *The Journey* and got a role as a restaurant waitress in popular tshiVenda television drama, *Muvhango*.

Joyce Mamohwibidu Ledwaba aka Majoy from gaMadiba, Mokopane has backed various musicians like Lazarus Kgagudi, Pat Shange and Dan Nkosi. After knocking on various doors, in 2005 she released her Northern Sotho Afro-pop CD, *Modiidi*, featuring tracks like *Limpopo* and *Modiidi wa Matepe*.

Young Kelly Khumalo released her debut album *TKO* at the end of August 2005 featuring tracks like the hit *Qinisela*. The Katlehong-born singer became media fodder following her response to a journalist’s question about her status as a young lady. The media was also fascinated by her “revealing” regalia on stage. It is however interesting how relative the term reveal can be – situational or even contextual. In 2006 she released her second album, *Itshitshi*. She later left her company Bonsai Entertainment owned by Mzwandile “Bonsai” Shongwe and Sarah Shongwe who initially met her during SABC 1’s talent search, *Crux Gospel Star*. She announced that she would release her next album with ProKelly Entertainment, a company she co-owned with concert promoter, Prosper Mkwaiwa. The album *Siyajabula* was released through her former company due to contractual obligations. In 2007 she starred in e-tv’s drama, *Rhythm City*.